



Parenting Tips

LEARNING TO COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR TEENAGER

As a parent of a teenager you must maintain discipline, while at the same time understanding your teenager's growing need for independence and even rebellion. Adolescence is a trying period, but it is also an exciting one. Keep the lines of communication open. Teenagers most often cite "not being listened to" as their biggest gripe about their parents. Some of the following suggestions may help:

- Give your undivided attention when your teenager wants to talk to you. Don't read, watch TV, or make yourself busy with other tasks.
- Listen calmly. Concentrate on understanding your teenager's point of view. Don't start preaching when a give-and-take discussion is wanted.
- Use a respectful, courteous tone of voice. If we talk to our kids as we talk to other people, they might be more likely to seek us out as confidants. How many friends would we have if talked with our friends as we talk with our kids?
- Avoid making judgments. Anyone avoids confiding in someone who is critical. It is not necessary to approve of your teenager's behavior, but it is important to understand his feelings.
- Keep the door open on any subject. Teenagers often pay a very high price for not having the right information about many subjects, including sex and drugs.
- Permit expression of ideas and feelings even when they are different from yours. Often young people "test" their ideas in conversation. Be willing to listen and acknowledge his opinions, even if they alarm you. Then offer your viewpoints, recognizing that love and mutual respect can exist, even when points of view are different.
- Say nice things. Too often parents tend to focus on poor performance and behavior. Everyone needs acceptance and appreciation.
- Hold family meetings giving everyone a voice in family affairs and a chance to participate in decision-making.

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